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# AFRICAN MASS MOVEMENTS.

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By Rev.  
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*(of the Gold Coast).*

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# ASSIGNMENTS FOR A STUDY CIRCLE.

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## Subject for Discussion :

What response from the Church at home is called for by the African Mass Movements?

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## QUESTIONS.

- 1.—Imagine the fetich-burning scene in a West African bush-village. What had happened in the minds of (a) the fetich priest, (b) the village headman, (c) a village woman, to bring about this scene? How will they feel about their action a month hence?
- 2.—The "staff" of Mappa received a letter from Fourah Bay College offering him a year's training. What will be his answer?
- 3.—What material in this chapter would you use in an address, *e.g.*, at an English village missionary meeting?—
  - (a) How would you win their interest at the beginning?
  - (b) What points would you make about the Movements?
  - (c) For what would you appeal? (The Circle should discuss what is the most vital need.)

# AFRICAN MASS MOVEMENTS.

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## The Movements.

THERE are in Africa, certain large districts where the people are moving away in a mass from the idol and the fetich to a new and larger faith.

It is now well known how "prophet" Harris went through Apolonia and the French Ivory Coast preaching a Gospel which resulted in a mighty disbelief in the power of the Fetich, which till then had held the unswerving confidence of the native. Our hearts have glowed to hear of this man's wanderings from place to place, preaching constantly with unbounded zeal, and mighty power.

Try to picture an African bush village. Just a straggling street, with incoherent masses of huts on either side, in and out of which move a motley crowd of men, women, children, goats and fowls.

As you enter the village you see the guardian fetich of the village. Look around the houses and you see everywhere a—something, rag, bone, wood, stone or what-not—fetich. If you observe closely you see that the fetich plays an important part in the life of the native. It is part of the very life. It is supposed to have a power which is almost unlimited. One fetich in my possession has the power to slay an enemy—after a suitable sacrifice has been made. Another has the power to cure disease. There is a fetich to curse (generally) or bless (sometimes, not often) every part of life.

Now look at this scene. Somewhere near the palaver tree a crowd is surrounding a man who is

speaking. Excited, earnest, terribly enthusiastic, he is. By and by one steals away from the crowd, to return bearing his fetich. Again, one who was listening very attentively from the fringe has gone away, only to come back bearing very many and important fetiches. For the moment the interest of the crowd turns from the preacher to this figure, for he is the fetich priest. As they watch he throws his burden at the feet of the preacher. Soon the village is lit by the blaze of a great bonfire of fetiches, and as its glare dies down the darkness enfolds a village where a mass movement has begun.

But the preacher has gone. He has awakened the village, he has started the mass moving and his work is accomplished. The Spirit who guides him leads him to another place, where the same thing happens.

Not all are swayed by him. There is a powerful opposition to his work. Faith in the fetich is dying hard in many a fierce soul. The success of the new evangel has stirred to a new enthusiasm many of the devotees of the old. One powerful king told me how angry he was to think that so many of his subjects were becoming Christians. He was convinced that this had caused the death of one of his relatives, and he was determined to oppose in every way he could the spread of the new faith. *But the mass is moving.* This is true of Apolonia, and the greater part of the Ivory Coast.

The movement in Nigeria may lack something of the picturesqueness and dramatic effect of the central figure, but is none the less real.

Sometimes the visit of a travelling evangelist or a missionary, sometimes a converted prodigal returning home, very often (and what cause for rejoicing!) a mission band of converts from a neighbouring village—whatever the immediate cause the result is this: a great number of people with all faith in the fetich gone; and a new hope in Christ.

Here is an example of how the work progresses: Some of our young Christians went to——, in order to

labour for their living, and at the same time to do the work of Christians as ambassadors for Christ among the heathen. Their efforts met with great success. There were during the year thirty-six baptisms of candidates who had broken their idols, pulled down their fetich houses, and given themselves to Christ.

This is not a turning from a road beset with thorns to an easy path. We must realise that persecution is not dead. Men have lost their goods, have been flogged, boycotted and imprisoned. *But they do not turn back.*

At Igbora our people suffered a great deal of opposition, yet our minister is able to say "Persecution tends to confirm the faith of the Christians, and extend the Kingdom of God."

Here then in Nigeria you are faced with a large community definitely moving.

In Northern Rhodesia our missionaries have gone from village to village, the first preachers of Christ. And as a result—a constant appeal, a demand for teachers. As early as 1915 the chiefs were asking that teachers should be sent.

There are now a hundred young people reading the New Testament in the vernacular. In one place the people were so anxious for instruction that they marked out and hoed a path three feet wide and sixteen miles long to make it easy for a teacher to go to them.

### **Again—A Mass Moving.**

In these movements the immediate agency is nearly always a converted African. This is one of the brightest hopes for the future. The converted African is primarily missionary. The spreading of the Gospel is an essential part of his Christian life—not an addendum. These great movements are true fruits of the Spirit of God in the humble lives of native converts.

I remember telling a boy some of the parables of our Lord. It was his first hearing of the Gospel,



but he went out and within a week had brought together about thirty more boys equally ignorant, that they, too, might learn of the love of God.

It is God's love overflowing. This is in contrast to the animistic beliefs of the people. This new faith inspires men to sacrifice for the good of others. The fetich also calls for sacrifice, but always for one's self. Christian teaching brings news of a God who is in personal relation, and that relation one of love. The God of the Christian guards His own from all evils; the fetich needs to be guarded against. Christ is winning the people and holding them with the bonds of love, breaking all the bonds of fear. I shall never forget the look of joy—even rapture—when at last a young man was convinced that God really loved *him*, and was *his* friend.

## **The Masses are Moving. Why? and Whither?**

They are moving because the faith they had is insufficient for their soul's demand. They are finding the fetich helpless and hopeless and utterly discredited. The following is typical. I have a piece of sugar-cane wrapped with string, with a spike of rusty iron stuck into one end. It used to belong to a soldier, a British soldier fighting for us in East Africa, though his skin was dusky. As he faced the dangers of war he turned to religion to safeguard him from evil. At a cost of two pounds the priest provided him with the object above described. That was our brother's protection, his hope. But he found it did not, and could not, protect. He found it hopeless. Then Christ found him, and he rejoices in certainty of hope.

The fetich does not satisfy the soul's demand. The masses are moving because they have heard a voice of wonderful appeal, making rich promises, offering rich bounties. The uplifted Christ, uplifted in pain to relieve *their* need, is drawing them.

Two of us were showing lantern pictures to some natives who were not yet converted. They looked and

listened quietly and without any response till they saw Doré's "Christ on the Cross." Then instantly there ran through the awed crowd a murmur of wonder, of reverence and assent. Deep called to deep between a Suffering Saviour and the lost whom He had come to seek and to save.

Other motives there are, undoubtedly. One cannot doubt that some have made a fetich of the class ticket and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and look to find in these a passport to a glorious undreamed-of Heaven. To possess such a passport one must be baptised ; to be baptised one must be taught.

Some such motives there are, and they are a source of great anxiety to the missionary, but I do most emphatically believe that in the main the motive is found in a spiritual yearning which only Christ can satisfy.

It was a beautiful, simple faith which made one old man say, "I just wait. When my Master say 'come,' I go."

The great test is in results, and there is abundant proof of the reality of the spiritual experience. It is manifest in the changed lives of many. They are not perfect, and looked at from an absolute standard they are often very faulty, but looked at in view of the place from which they come one can only confess the miracle and exclaim, "What hath God wrought."

Here is the Church's responsibility and opportunity. Here is the open door. She must see it. If she does not, Islam will. For the moment there is not a very great danger, but these people are waiting for us, are waiting with a patience which fills us with wonder. What if we dally too long? Will not our Master be judged by our lack of enthusiasm?

May it not be that failing our going in answer to their cries, they shall call out to Islam to go and help? It has happened before.

Where there has been an appeal to Islam it has never failed to respond.

Shall we? The answer is with us who are members of Christ's Church.

## Shepherding.

The masses are moving, the question is "whither?" Undoubtedly the desire of the movement is Christward.

But who is Christ, and what does the Christian faith mean in privilege and responsibility? You and I learned the answers to such questions long ago at our mother's knee, and as we have grown older we have read for ourselves the stories of Jesus. The ideas of communion with God, and fellowship with the Eternal are familiar to us. We cannot remember the time when we did not have some idea of self-sacrificing love as manifested in Jesus Christ. But these ideas which were our birthright are new to this moving mass. A delightful feature of the work is the extreme willingness to learn, but one of the most difficult things is to convey these new ideas to a mind which can hardly realise them.

If the masses could read it would be comparatively easy to supply books and to teach through the written word. As it is, the teaching needs to take a very simple form, a kind of instruction which demands especially good teachers.

Above all it requires teachers who are living examples of the truth they speak.

The teaching must cover a very wide ground. Little or nothing can be taken for granted. The most commonplace rules of conduct for daily life must be taught. The bearing of spiritual truth on material things must be explained; morals must be made clear and enforced.

It needs to be pointed out, for instance, that if all are the children of God, then a man's wife is his equal, and that he owes her devotion and respect! The idea of reverence, as we know it, is not a natural thing to a native. I know of churches where they learnt with surprise that it was not right to smoke a pipe during service in church!

How often does an infant stumble! What tender care does it need! No less the infant church. The



mothering of these infants is the privilege, and very grave responsibility of the parent church.

To change the metaphor—unless there are shepherds, the sheep will stray. Pastoral work is essential and urgent. At present there are so many sheep that the few shepherds are well nigh incapable of caring for them all. In the Apolonia Mission, covering over a thousand square miles, we have one English missionary and six native evangelists. Such a fact needs no enlargement.

There is a pitiful shortage of workers in the old-established and well-organised circuits, but in the regions of the mass movements the lack is a tragedy, and may easily spell disaster.

The labours of some of the native workers are heroic. I think of one case which is typical of many. At Mappe the church is beautifully clean, the congregation is large and well behaved, and comparatively well informed. There is a flourishing boys' school, where the boys are not only taught the rudiments, but are also shown how to look after the farm work. The evangelist's house and compound are models of order and cleanliness, the house having been built by the evangelist, assisted by the school boys and members. There are weekly prayer meetings, society and catechumen's classes also. Three more villages, each a day's journey distant, are under the charge of this village.

The "staff" consists of one man. The strain on him is enormous, but he makes no complaint of the amount of work. He simply says, "I beg you, sir, have me taught so that I can teach better."

The opportunity in the work of the day schools cannot be exaggerated. The influence of really good Christian schools in such places would be enormous. But the staffs are too small and very often consciously inefficient. The accommodation is poor, and the materials scanty. I know a teacher who is trying to teach five classes in one room without a roof, and who has one blackboard, a few books and little or no know-

ledge. He simply has the pluck and will to carry on till someone better equipped can be sent.

These men ask for, and must have, the practical sympathy and prayers of the church, prayers demonstrably sincere by practical assistance in the work of training the teachers and evangelists. There are institutions for this training already established. They need to be constantly supported, and their scope widened.

The sight of these needs lays a grave burden on the heart of the missionary, and on the church which sends him.

There is another burden which is much harder to bear, and which well nigh means heart-break. I have received very many deputations from kings and people, begging that someone should be sent to preach the Saviour Christ. They have spoken with me, and then have waited round the bungalow like hungry children who have been refused food, and who linger lest by chance the refusal may be reversed. Try to put yourself in the missionary's place and say "No" to such a request. The reproach must be removed, and will be, but for the present each refusal is a tragedy.

This is not pessimism. It is the statement of one of the mightiest opportunities the church has ever had, and calls for our deepest gratitude. It is the voice of the spy returning to say that it is a goodly land of promise, and calling on all the Israel of God to enter in and possess the land.

## **Building up the Church.**

The Master Builder has given us the materials for a glorious edifice. Let us take heed lest we forget that "Christ is the chief corner stone!"

The work of building is not going to be done easily nor quickly. There are going to be many disappointments, and we shall often seem to be working in vain. It may be necessary to teach us in this way the "tricks of the tool's true play."

There is always a temptation to hasten on to the spectacular part of the building. We are desperately anxious to see something, to be able to show something. The vital part of every building is *not* seen. The foundation is buried. We shall require much of organisation and routine and suchlike in our foundation, but *all* must be founded on Christ.

For good building we must have a succession of men fully equipped for their task. There are many men whose enthusiasm is great, but whose qualifications are few.

In this, as in every building, the best workmen are those who are most familiar with the materials. There is an immediate need for a well-trained native ministry. In addition to being truly spiritual men, they must also be well educated. There is a great attraction for such men in the Government and commercial offices, which offer the opening of a career far more enticing in its material aspect.

To the right man that enticement will not count, and there is growing up a ministry which is strong in its spirituality, its earnestness and its education. A scheme has recently been arranged whereby all ministers on the West Coast may be well and thoroughly trained. At Fourah Bay, in Sierra Leone, there is a college owned by the Church Missionary Society, and affiliated with Durham University. The new scheme makes it possible for Wesleyan students to have the advantages of this college, living in an hostel under the care of one of our own missionaries. Thus, men from each District will have the advantage of fellowship with men of their own age, but of different tribes, and also with men of different shades of thought in religious matters. There will also be a social college life, which is impossible in a small institution, but which is one of the most valuable parts of college training.

South Africa has also made good provision for the training of its ministers.

One of the duties of the Church is to build up very patiently such a ministry as can eventually take the

full responsibility of all pastoral and circuit work. It cannot be done hurriedly, nor ought it to be so done. Ill-trained men will be inefficient now, and a positive danger later on. Too much care cannot be exercised in this matter.

In the primitive church very little can be left to the laymen. The minister will therefore need not only to be trained in the subject matter of Christianity, but also helped to understand the intricacies of circuit finance and general church organisation. He must be made to realise the value of time and its methodical use. One would recommend a course in home building and social life, if it were possible.

These things may not seem to be pressing—may even seem trivial—when there is the great work of soul-winning to be done, and done immediately. But they are important. The beauty and security of the whole fabric often depends on a small detail. Our workmen must be thoroughly competent to work not only in the great outlines of the building, but also in the delicate tracings.

They must be men of vision, who have seen the finished design. They must know that the great effects are gained by unwearying labour spent on details.

## **Womanhood.**

Mention has been made of home-building. Apart from Christ there are houses and huts in Africa, but no homes. No words are needed to express the magnitude of that lack. Christ, while blessing, was blessed by His home.

At present there is nothing in African family life to help Christianity, but there is much to hinder. The Christianisation and education of the men is certainly advancing in a wonderful manner, but the home will and must revolve round the mother. No country can ever rise to a higher permanent level than the level of its women. We are not doing great things for the women of Africa.



Too much praise cannot be given to the work of the Wesley Deaconesses in the Girls' High Schools, but from the nature of things the influence of such work, though great, is indirect as far as the women of the moving masses are concerned.

At these High Schools girls are received and trained in the duties of home as well as being taught the usual subjects of education. The school is as far as possible a home, and the girls are patiently guided into the ways of Christian womanhood. They learn self-respect, they learn dignity and, above all, the meaning and value of love.

These girls grow up and marry and the house becomes a home. I have been to the houses of some of them and have seemed to breathe a more generous atmosphere. The influence that these girls and women wield is very great ; they are as leaven which leaveneth the whole lump.

The visitor to an African Leaders' Meeting will be struck with the devotion and care with which the women leaders do their work. They are jealous for the purity of the church. Owing to the work of the High Schools they are growing in numbers and influence, and as they marry and go with their husbands to the interior—into the regions of the Mass Movements—they do a work of which we are proud and for which we are profoundly thankful.

At the same time we are doing practically no direct work for the women of the moving masses, where the need for work is colossal.

It is true that we are able to go amongst the women quite freely. I was called out one night to visit a girl who was ill. There was no obstacle put in my way at all, and I was given a free hand. (May I say in passing that two women leaders of the church came for me, paddled my canoe, and for days had done the only nursing that poor girl had.) I found the girl laid on the floor of a small hut. Close by where she lay a fire was burning on the floor, and the air was thick with smoke. As many people as could pack them-



selves into the tiny hut had done so. It was literally impossible for me to get in until someone got out. I immediately cleared the place, then turned my attention to the girl. She was terribly wasted and weak. For nine days she had been suffering from malignant dysentery. At that stage there was very little to do save to ease the pain a little and give her more comfort. But I believe that a woman missionary would have been called in *earlier*.

This is a case where a woman would probably have saved much physical suffering, and where a man could do it, too, when aware of it. But there are worse forms of suffering than the merely physical, and man will never be made aware of them, and could not help if he were aware. We do not know how to reach the hidden pains. That there is pain we know, and that is all. Men missionaries can do, and are doing, much to put woman into her rightful place in Africa, but there is vital work to do which only a woman can do. While man ponders over causes and searches for remedies, woman looks, and listens, and *knows*.

The tenderness and love of women missionaries can alone bring in the fullest degree the love and tenderness of Christ. The Women's Auxiliary is bringing untold good to India and China and has already pledged itself to South Africa.

Oh, the bitterness of the need of the women and girls of the moving masses of West Africa and Rhodesia! For women to enter into such work requires much faith and great heroism, but Methodism possesses such women if only they can be sent.

### **The Hope before us.**

The things of which we have spoken are necessary to the perfecting of the work before us.

A true spiritual change has already taken place in the people. There is a real growth in grace, but it is very slow—and who can wonder?

Try to realise the place from which they have come, remember that they are even now surrounded

by paganism of the blackest and most revolting type. And yet it is most delightful hearing when they speak of the triumph of Divine Grace in their lives—and they will speak, anywhere and everywhere.

We must guard against anything that would hinder spiritual growth. There are influences at work which are very harmful to the spreading and deepening of true Christian life.

The liquor traffic is already a curse and a blot on England's fair name. The people as a whole do not create the demand. The demand comes from the sordid greed of shareholders, who can obtain bigger and quicker profits from rum than from anything else. The desire for revenue blinds Governments to the dangers of the traffic.

There is also a degraded Roman Catholicism which has very little room for true spirituality, but which works on the superstitions of the people. I have myself seen a baby wearing a filthy piece of string and black cloth, the remedy for rickets, prescribed and supplied by the priest in the name of the church. To the native it is merely the white man's fetich.

Pomp and ceremony, with a multitude of vestments and priestly rites and mysterious elements, all appeal strongly to the native mind. But they fail to satisfy the soul's craving.

Holding a service one evening in a bush village street I saw a multitude of people approaching, bearing lanterns and candles. In the darkness their approach was weird, to say the least, especially as they approached to the accompaniment of the tom-toms and drunken shouting of a funeral "custom." The people themselves were singing—after a fashion.

My congregation and myself seemed in danger of being swept away by them, but I put on my best policeman's look and, holding up my hand, said, "Stop!" They did.

I then preached to them a simple Gospel appeal, one of their number acting as interpreter. Afterwards they asked me to go again and preach to them, they wanted to hear more.

Their spokesman was the Catholic Catechist, and they were the Catholic members !

Again, on a journey, a deputation came to me from a village where no one is working save Catholics. The deputation from this church came, begging me to go and preach the Gospel to them "as Roman Catholicism did not satisfy them, and *they did not trust it.*"

The simple, spiritual Gospel has the stronger drawing power.

It may be dangerous to prophesy, but we may look into the future with much confidence. The Church at home will not fail. She will do her part to meet the need, and granted the Spirit inspired work of very many years there will come in God's good time, even in these backward parts of a backward continent, a church that shall be strong and true and glorious.

We can look to a time when it will stand alone. The aid of the home church is a scaffold that will ultimately be removed.

The native churches are keen to support themselves. They do not need much teaching to realise that they ought to be independent of financial aid. There is a growing eagerness to help in the work of the church. I have even had my kit carried a day's journey by the leaders' meeting !

To have an office, however small, is no mean honour. There is a strong, growing "layman's movement."

It is still far ahead, but we believe in the certainty of a self-supporting and self-governing church, a building fitly framed for the Master's service. Those of us who are now working will grow old in the service and still not see these things, but those who come after us SHALL.

Meantime we must all labour on. All who can on the field—many at the home base, but all united in prayer.

All must pray and still pray, and give and pray again and continue in prayer.

EDMUND C. HORLER.